



Economic Growth Board

Monday 4 July 2022 at 4.00 pm

Minutes

Present

Councillor Ian Brookfield (Chair)
Lee Barron
Anita Bhalla

Councillor Ian Courts
Corin Crane
Councillor Matthew Dormer
Councillor George Duggins
Lindsey Flynn

Councillor Peter Hughes
Councillor Shaz Saleem
Andy Street
Sarah Windrum

Mike Wright

Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation
Midlands Trades Union Congress
Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local
Enterprise Partnership
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Black Country Chamber of Commerce
Non-Constituent Authorities
Coventry City Council
Black Country Local Enterprise
Partnership
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Mayor of the West Midlands
Coventry & Warwickshire Local
Enterprise Partnership
West Midlands Innovation Board

**Item Title
No.**

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Stuart Croft (Higher Education Sector), Councillor Bob Sleigh (Portfolio Lead for Finance) and Tom Westley (Black Country LEP).

2. Minutes - 13 May 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Economic Conditions in the West Midlands

The board considered a report from the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills & Communities summarising the long-term economic forecasts for the West Midlands, the latest quantitative economic intelligence, recent feedback and insight from West Midlands businesses and from the COVID-19 Economic Impact Group.

The Chair enquired whether higher employment rates in some parts of the region were masking pockets of lower employment. Delma Dwight (Black

Country Consortium) reported that there was a mixed picture across the region, and that she would provide trend data for each local authority area to future meeting to show better the localised unemployment hotspots. Andy Street noted that the first results from the 2021 census had recently been published and requested summary briefing note on the local data. Delma Dwight undertook to provide the board with this information.

Resolved:

The current economic conditions in the West Midlands, including insight from the region's businesses and long-term economic forecasts, be noted.

4. Progress Update on LEP Integration

The board considered a report from the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Productivity & Skills on the latest work to take forward LEP Integration in the West Midlands, as part of an overall plan to simplify and strengthen economic development functions across the West Midlands.

Councillor Ian Courts stressed the importance of ensuring that the voice of businesses within the region continued to input into the WMCA's activities, and considered that a more innovative approach needed to be undertaken to ensure this. Sarah Windrum noted that the Liverpool City Region and West Yorkshire combined authorities had integrated their local business sectors into combined authority activity, and it would be useful to know if there were any lessons that could be learnt from their experiences. Corin Crane stressed that engagement with the business sector also needed to happen outside of formal board meetings. The Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Productivity & Skills noted these comments and undertook to develop them into the continuing work to embed the voice of the business sector into WMCA activities.

Resolved:

- (1) The progress made to date, particularly the focus on 'core' functions to be integrated and the reduction in Government funding for them, be noted.
- (2) The positions regarding embedding the voice of the private sector and each 'core' LEP function be noted.
- (3) It be noted that Directors of Economic Development had commissioned the three Growth Hubs to develop options for a sustainably funded business support model from April 2023 for consideration in September 2022.

5. UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan

The board considered a report from the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Productivity & Skills and the Head of Insight - Economic Delivery, Skills & Communities providing an update on progress towards developing the WMCA's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan.

The Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Productivity & Skills highlighted

a letter that the Mayor and the Chair had written to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities expressing the WMCA's frustrations at the parameters and processes associated with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme that were imposing national restrictions in a way that was preventing the WMCA from being agile and responsive, and working against the principles of greater devolution. A response to this letter had yet to be received.

The Chair confirmed that at this stage, the WMCA only needed to develop a single high-level plan containing a broad indication of where its collective priorities would be. It did not need to agree individual projects or to confirm the local distribution of funds, which would be agreed at a later stage in discussions between the Mayor and constituent authorities.

The Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Productivity & Skills noted that the Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan would only cover constituent authority areas, and that the non-constituent authorities would be agreeing their own plans applicable to their geographic areas.

Resolved:

- (1) The broad approach to prioritising the UK Shared Prosperity Fund funding across the three themes be noted.
- (2) The wider skills investment to reduce the demand on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for this activity be noted.
- (3) The timescale and next steps for the development and approval of the outline UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan at the WMCA Board on 15 July 2022 be noted.
- (4) The further work requested by constituent authorities to review the methodology for allocating resources to better reflect the principles of levelling up be noted.

6. West Midlands Innovation Accelerator

The board considered a report from the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills & Communities on the progress made on the West Midlands Innovation Accelerator, overseen by the West Midlands Innovation Board.

Announced in the Levelling-Up White Paper, the West Midlands Innovation Accelerator would see around £33m invested in the region over the next three years to bolster the region's innovation and research & development capability and capacity to spark commercial growth and investment.

The Chair stressed the importance of ensuring that existing pockets of excellence within the region were engaged with this work, particularly in

respect of CleanTech and Modern Methods of Construction. Mike Wright (West Midlands Innovation Board) supported this, stressing the importance of recognising where excellence already existed. Councillor Peter Hughes noted the CleanTech workshop held on 29 June and enquired as to the level of interest this had generated. Mike Wright reported that attendance had been very good, with 60 delegates in attendance and more joining online. He undertook to send a list of delegates to Councillor Peter Hughes.

Resolved:

- (1) The direction proposed by the West Midlands Innovation Board for the £33m West Midlands Innovation Accelerator and the process proposed to reach final decisions in Winter 2022 be endorsed.
- (2) The direction of the draft business plan be agreed, with the first stage submitted in conjunction with the Chair of the West Midlands Innovation Board.

7. West Midlands Plan for Growth

The board considered a report from the Executive Director for Economic Delivery, Skills & Communities on the plans for a regional economic event structured around the West Midlands Plan for Growth.

A regional economic event had been organised for 7 July in Wolverhampton with the aim of giving confidence about the region's economy and its long-term direction and potential, and showcasing how the West Midlands Plan for Growth would shape major cross-cutting interventions, including programmes like the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the West Midlands Innovation Accelerator.

Lindsey Flynn stressed the need to ensure that in respect of LEP integration, a clear narrative as to 'why' this was beneficial would help with business engagement.

Resolved:

- (1) The West Midlands Regional Economic Growth Event on 7 July 2022 be noted.
- (2) The evolving picture of cluster leadership, including business-led activity and capacity to embed that business direction across economic development levers, be noted.

8. Economic Growth Board Work Programme Update

The board considered a report from the Executive Director of Economic Delivery, Skills & Communities on its work programme in support of the region's overall vision to build a healthier, happier, better connected and more prosperous West Midlands.

Resolved:

The updated work programme, which was a live document and would

continue to be refined according to the economic situation, priorities and decisions required, be noted.

The meeting ended at 5.20 pm.